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Ministry of Forests and Range

FIRE SEASON STARTS WITH ESCAPED BACKYARD BURNS

VICTORIA – A lack of rainfall has kicked off the 2006 wildfire season early, with Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman asking the public to be vigilant when conducting backyard burns or grass burning for agricultural reasons.

"Although it's only April, the arrival of warm, drying weather in the Interior means even small fires have been escaping," said Coleman. "We've already responded to 29 fires since April 1, all of them started by people. Several of these fires got away and were burning very close to homes and communities."

On April 8, a grassfire located 10 km north of Williams Lake prompted a joint response between local structural fire fighters and BC Forest Service Protection crews. The fire burned very quickly, threatening a number of structures. The fire was eventually contained at 45 hectares. A second fire in the immediate area also required response by forest firefighters and was contained at 22 hectares.

Grass and open fire escapes are the most common fire threats in spring, as homeowners and land managers burn debris from the winter, but sometimes underestimate fire risk conditions or their fire control capabilities. There is no link between the timing of spring fire season and the seriousness of the summer fire season.

In British Columbia, the Wildfire Act specifies a person's legal obligations when using fire in, or within, one km of forest land or grassland. Those using fire are responsible for ensuring the fire is safe to light, that the fire does not escape, and that they have adequate resources immediately available to handle any escapes that might occur. More information on fire use obligations is available on the Ministry of Forests and Range website.

British Columbians who live in or near the forest are reminded that they can help reduce the risk of forest fires that may threaten their homes by taking simple steps to clear their yards and homes of combustible materials and vegetation. Suggestions and tips are found in the FireSmart Homeowner's Manual available from local fire departments or online.

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"Although weather is the biggest factor in the kind of fire season we have members of the public have a huge influence on the overall cost and safety of the fire season," said Coleman. "The biggest contribution people can make is to prevent all unwanted fires in the first place, and also to report fires as soon as they see them."

Report grass and forest fires to 1-800-663-5555, or *5555 on the cellular network.

For links to the Wildfire Act and regulations, and the FireSmart Homeowner's Manual, visit: http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/protect/.

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